



## SUCCESS STORY

### The Community That Reads Together Stays Together

Sindh Reading Program's re-purposed libraries are offering reading, learning and growth opportunities to people of all ages in Karachi's Lyari Town.

#### Our Libraries, Our Space



Our groundbreaking approach in re-positioning libraries from inward-focused reading rooms to a grand communal space is helping them balance the traditional needs and operations with outreach to the wider community, particularly girls.



SRP supported libraries have a built-in program function to mobilize communities and inspire them to take ownership of the space. Image above shows young children working their creative magic at Lyari Textbook Library in Lyari Town, Karachi.

In 2015 when USAID, through Sindh Reading Program (SRP), rolled up its sleeves to help public libraries in the city of Quaid reclaim their lost identity, the idea was to turn them into incubators of discovery and communication; places where people, irrespective of age and gender, gather, and where information comes to life through reading, learning and interacting with each other.

Historical libraries usually fly under the radar as heritage landmarks, fading away with time, becoming less relevant and more obsolete.

Lyari Textbook Library was one such public reading space. The unsung library has long been a part of the cultural and social landscape of Lyari - a densely populated town in the north-east of the world's seventh largest urban city, Karachi. However, the haunting silence inside the library and cobwebbed shelves of decade old books was a glaring reflection of the intellectual bankruptcy of Lyari Town.

The face-lifting of Lyari Textbook Library was not as huge a challenge as to make it a vibrant community destination, so it can take on a more civic role.

"Therefore, we decided to rethink our space and our strategy. We took advantage of the new outlook of the library created by SRP, and developed some strong programs and special events", told Aseela, SRP-trained librarian at Lyari Textbook Library.

"Our starting point was children's reading corner, which hosted the first 'Big Brother, Big Sister' session in March 2016. This session allowed older siblings read to their younger ones, and also engage with other children of their age." Aseela continued.

Reading circles and sessions at the library by SRP experts have made our reading corner a real magnate, drawing young children from adjoining neighborhoods in droves.

In another critical breakthrough, Lyari Textbook Library has been able to mobilize a large number of young girls and women to access offline and online resources available at the library.

"I see this as a major achievement", says Aseela. "And this has been largely made possible because of SRP's designated female corner. Additionally, we have also designed female-centered programs such as career counselling and teachers' awareness raising sessions."

In the last three months (April-June), 1200 people have participated in a myriad of community events, ranging from Kids Day to Mobile Library at a health camp to Adult Reading Sessions.

Mr. Ramzan Baloch, author of Lyari Ki Adhuri Kahani, conducted a reading circle on his book. He was accompanied by columnist of Express News, Mr Shabbir Ahmed Arman, and Asst. Professor at LUMS Dr. Nida Kirmani. "We are moving toward change, whether we are slow, but our goal is to promote education in the society that is the need of our mind."